COVID-19 Higher Education Workgroups

WORKGROUP REPORT

Working Strategies for Classrooms, Labs, Tech Focused, and Other Learning Settings

CREATED: 05/17/2020

UPDATED: 06/04/2020

This document has been reviewed by MDH; this document was originally developed by the COVID-19 higher education workgroup focused on classrooms and other learning settings (for membership see Appendix B).

Purpose of this document is to create optional strategies that higher education institutions can use to:

▪ Explore options on how to support the classroom and other learning settings this fall that both meet social distancing or other disease mitigation needs.

▪ Promote positive learning environments for faculty, staff, and students.

▪ This document is a living document and will be updated and edited as we continue to share ideas and learn more about COVID-19.

Introduction

Committee Message

Our committee researched, discussed, and developed strategies that Minnesota schools can use to meet their needs for providing classes this fall. Our committee’s diversity ranged from community and technical colleges to large public and private research schools from across Minnesota. We had a wide array of needs, thoughts, concerns, and ideas, resulting in detailed discussion that is incorporated into this report.

Our charge was to explore options on how to support the classroom and other learning settings this fall that both meet social distancing or other disease mitigation needs, and promote a positive learning environment for faculty, staff, and students.¹

Minnesota schools are faced with unprecedented challenges in preparing for a new academic year amid COVID-19. In the following scenarios, specific considerations for different models of operations are offered as guidance:

▪ In person/on campus

▪ Hybrid course offerings
Online only course offerings

Schools can refer to a table for guidance in this report for consideration in response to “community transmission” that may occur on their campuses.

Schools across the state worked together thinking carefully about how to achieve offering classes on their campuses. It is our assumption that workforce protection and safety are critical to reopening, and measures will be taken to ensure that faculty, staff, and students have appropriate protective plans, supplies, and guidance to safely return to campus. Further, the below are guidelines individual institutions can use depending on their their unique circumstances.

Decision Factors

- Decisions about courses will depend on multiple factors including requirements for 3-4 foot or 6 foot social distancing, masking, the degree of hybrid instruction utilized, residence capacities, and the facilities and technical capabilities at the schools and in the various colleges.
  - **FROM MDH:** Institutions should have a plan for a 3 foot or 4 foot distance for this fall, as well as a 6 foot distance.

- **Question for MDH re: social distancing. With virus transmission being carried through airborne droplets, how much consideration should be given length of time in a room and the air handling capacities?**
  - **ANSWER from MDH:** The virus is mostly droplet, it is not considered an airborne pathogen. It can be aerosolized so that it hangs in the air a little longer, however for that to happen it must go through an aerosolizing procedure, which generally are not happening in the typical classroom. Thus, with regular airflow (see below bullet) the rooms should not need extra precautions in terms of how long classes can be held or need for prolonged spacing between classes.

- **Question for MDH re: social distancing and physical activities, choir, orchestra, dance, etc., are the recommendations going to provide additional guidance for these types of classes; for example, how far apart should choir members stand since 6 feet surely isn’t far enough?**
  - The above should follow the current recommendations for social distancing and if a sport, adult sports (link coming soon)
  - Choir is currently being evaluated as we have seen that it can be a super spreader event, we hope guidance will be coming out soon for choirs.

- When possible, students should be positioned so they are not facing each other in the classroom environment - [recommended CDC guidance](#)

- Classrooms have different layouts and the capacity may vary when social distancing is figured into the physical layout of the room type (i.e.,arrangements for active learning or auditorium seating).
Decisions may need to be made on multiple factors. We attempted to address all these different factors including type of instruction, local community transmission levels and the institutions capacity for isolation and quarantine.

Plan and model classroom approaches by the levels of transmission (none, minimal to moderate, and substantial transmission), as designated by the CDC.  

Schools should consider how they might “dial-up or down” scenarios based on disease prevalence in the community and metrics provided by the MDH (for example, percent case positivity, number of hospitalizations and number of new cases) -- build off from IHE Guidance from CDC. 

- MDH COMMENT: We are currently working on these dial-up and dial-down metrics, we are using the past three months to help inform the future.

Committee Assumptions

- Minnesota Department of Health guidelines for sanitizing, symptom screening, monitoring, testing, contact tracing, etc. should be followed.

- Instructors, faculty, student affairs educators, staff, and students will be required to adhere to community standards related to the above guidelines. Training may be needed so that instructors and students adhere to the schools required guidelines.

- Schools/programs will continue to go through the required approvals for contact activities to allow students to make progress towards graduation and some programs may need to rethink some of their requirements. Governor’s Order 20-52 addresses this specifically.

- Programs may get necessary approvals from accrediting agencies.

- Class passing times, corridor distancing should be considered (staggered arrival and departure times).

- International students may not be allowed in the country right away - online curriculum may be needed.

- Some schools and colleges may use calendar tools such as block scheduling, adjustments in the calendar, and/or adjustments in the portion of the calendar spent on-campus in order to make a scenario work.

- Masking of students, instructors and faculty will be decided by MDH. MDH currently calls for masks in classrooms when individuals are ≤ 6 feet apart.

- Protocol for closer physical space requirements might be necessary for some activities (such as labs or other technical training courses).
Keys to Operationalize

Schools should evaluate the need to order protective gear and develop policies for its use (e.g., masks, face shields, gloves). This may impact class offerings if not available.6

▪ Develop policies for residence halls, classrooms, corridors, and other locations and circumstances in order to prioritize safety.
▪ For international students that are unable to come to the U.S. due to visa concerns, an international online curriculum for fall term may need to be developed.

Additional Considerations

▪ For students that are unable to come to campus due to health concerns, schools might need to work with the student to develop flexible alternative solutions to maintain timely degree.7
▪ For faculty that are unable to come to campus due to health concerns, schools might need to invest in additional support for online course development so that they can instruct from home. This may include recording equipment, green screens, external hard drives, training, and designated time with an instructional designer.
▪ Some instructors/faculty and students may choose to not be on campus for periods of time or to self-quarantine. Instructors/faculty and staff should have plans in place for accommodation. Schools may need to support faculty and staff with good practices for students that choose to self-quarantine for part of or the entire semester.
▪ Instructors should be allowed in some cases to teach from their classroom, lab or other area. Schools could set up a review process for making an exception if the Stay At Home order continues.

The committee has provided three scenarios that provide guidance for schools as they prepare for reopening in the fall. The committee also realizes that a combination of these scenarios may occur depending on the circumstances where the school is located and the availability of physical spaces and technology that may be required. However, our goal is to ensure the best educational opportunity for students at our institutions.

We have also inserted a chart for “dialing up” or “dialing down” guidance later in this report that provides some additional information to schools as they approach classroom scenarios with regard to the CDC guidelines.
In Person/On Campus Course and Class Instruction

Teaching Styles

Classes may be taught in a variety of ways to allow the in-person course offerings as much as possible. Many classes may need to shift to innovative delivery models to limit the number of students and/or timeframe in a room together, including combining online with face-to-face options.

Scheduling

Changes may be made to the course schedule’s locations and times in order to reduce corridor crowding and use of common areas. Based on classroom space, instructors and faculty may be asked to model course delivery that allows for staggering groups of students in lectures while others work on small group or individual assignments. That way, students can sit at least 3 feet or 6 feet apart depending on the social distancing guidelines.

▪ Consider offering some classes such as large lectures that would have been offered in-person online this year due to health concerns and to maximize classroom space with social distancing.

▪ There may be a range of approaches that will vary by discipline, college, and campus. However, it is important to note that course delivery may need to change in order to accommodate the number of students in the spaces available.

▪ To the degree that classes in “large” lecture halls could be moved online, cascading effects would allow smaller classes to move into larger spaces for social distancing.

▪ Labs, studios, or ensembles schools may need additional measures to ensure safety with close proximity activities between students. This may be an area where the institution chooses to do more aggressive screening or provide extra precautions. MDH is currently exploring the effectiveness of a cloth face covering in addition to a face shield.

▪ Potential hazards of the use of additional protective equipment, such as the flammability of cloth masks, must be considered in lab situations.

▪ Schools should consider having instructors and students use individually assigned high-touch items, such as white board markers.

▪ Schools may want to consider using assigned seating as part of their contact tracing strategy.

▪ Schools should consider using remote technology options for outside guests or presenters, rather than having in-person presentations or visits, when feasible.

▪ Schools may consider ways to reduce interaction between large groups of students. For example, schools might consider implementing a cohort model or limit courses from certain disciplines to specific buildings or classrooms.
If masks are worn in class then schools may need to provide additional technology such as microphones for individuals to be heard while speaking.

Assumptions

- Minnesota Department of Health guidelines for sanitizing, symptom screening, monitoring, testing, contact tracing, etc. will be followed.\(^4\)
- Physical contact should be non-existent in the classroom, lab, studio, music, dance and learner settings. When contact is required, following state guidelines is recommended.
- Schools should work with programs to ensure educational needs can be met whenever possible.
- Instructors may need to shift from face-to-face to online and should be prepared in some courses.

Classroom Considerations

- In a social distancing model, each room will need to be evaluated to determine maximum occupancy that is possible. (See Appendix A for examples)
- In general, the occupancy capacity of a classroom using a 6 foot social distancing requirement may be 25-50% of its usual seating capacity.
- Room measurements can be used to estimate the occupancy capacity; however, simply dividing a room’s square feet by a 6 foot by 6 foot personal space will likely lead to an overestimation of seats.
- Actual occupancy may need to be evaluated for each room based on the furniture being used, the specific configuration of the room, and any unique features of the space.
- Many common use rooms currently serve as multi-use spaces (for example, one course/instructor might have seats facing forward while the instructor for the next course has students arranged into small discussion groups).
  - To the extent possible, assign rooms to courses such that desk and seat movement is minimalized.
  - Use markings on the floor to indicate proper seat locations.
- Courses such as orchestra, choir, projecting spoken words and dance may have to look at the following:
  - Orchestra, band – larger workspace, proper distancing, sectionalized recording, separation of orchestral sections for example
  - Ballet/dance/choral/projection speaking – solos/small group recorded performances
  - In addition: standard health and safety practices (face shield, sanitization product, no sharing of instruments)
Hybrid Course Offerings

Teaching Styles and Scheduling

Schools resume operations with more social distancing measures in place. Additionally, a predetermined population of students may be off campus and learning online. This could involve rotating sub-groups of students to allow for all or most students to have some degree of an on-campus experience or an intensive one. Schools may need to determine which courses are most important to keep in a classroom.

Changes may be made to the course schedule’s locations and times in order to reduce corridor crowding and use of common areas. Based on classroom space, instructors and faculty may be asked to model course delivery that allows for staggering groups of students in lectures while others work on small group or individual assignments. That way, students can sit at least 3 feet or 6 feet apart depending on the social distancing guidelines.

Lab and studio work could be converted to a hybrid model of learning with some alternate modes of education that do not require students to be present on campus. This could include: incorporation of online instruction via BlackBoard, Canvas, Zoom or other programs, use of lab kits, video capture, simulation, remote control, etc. as a compliment to in-person instruction.

Assumptions

▪ Adjustments to physical space, protective gear, enforcement recommendations may need to be communicated by the schools.

▪ Schools may need to provide guidance to instructors on integrating their course into a hybrid format if determined necessary.

▪ Prioritization of in-person instruction for courses with academic outcomes that cannot be measured or achieved virtually, such as performance, laboratory, and clinical experiences may need to occur.

▪ Remote options may need to be planned for and available to support vulnerable students and staff, students in quarantine or isolation, and students and staff who cannot physically return to campus.7

▪ For in-person courses that require hands-on experiences, faculty might develop specialized plans for student safety. Examples might include expansions of simulated experiences in clinical scenarios for health professional students or detailed plans for dance, theater, and performance arts.

▪ Once faculty know which spaces they will be using and how many students they can accommodate, they may need to update syllabi to note: number of students in each session, length of each session, nature of activities, and instructions to students for specific physical distancing protocols, any available remote options and attendance options.
Schools may need to roll out lenient attendance policies that support students and encourage safe practices without creating barriers and without requiring unnecessary visits to health facilities for documentation of illness.

Students registered with the disability resource offices should receive additional communications about resources for students with learning disabilities or difficulties with remote learning platforms. Labs using chemicals or other irritant, hazardous materials may consider pre-lab videos, other media interactive modes of delivery.

Spaces with machinery, equipment and instruments may limit direct time utilizing screen sharing demonstrations, video playback, etc.

Courses such as orchestra, choir, projecting spoken words and dance may have to look at the following:

- Orchestra, band – larger workspace, proper distancing, sectionalized recording, separation of orchestral sections.
- Ballet/dance/choir/projection speaking – solos/small group recorded performances.
- In addition: standard health and safety practices (face shield, sanitization product, no sharing of instruments).

**Operationalizing**

Instructors may need help in integrating remote learners into face-to-face classrooms, providing asynchronous augments to courses to offset reduced seat time, and adapting to possible disruptions in delivery.

Decisions as to whether a course will be online or in-person may start by considering which classes can move online with least impact on students but shall also consider strategically identified groups of students.

Classrooms, corridors, study spaces, and residence halls may require new policies (and enforcement procedures).

A combination of campus-specific information-gathering and decisions shall be made to determine priorities for online/on-campus offerings (i.e., large lectures move online; any smaller first-year student courses in-person; graduate courses stay in-person; some lab, studio, activity courses in-person) and for certain groups of students (i.e., students with certain equity/access needs or facing other vulnerabilities, student-athletes, students receiving scholarships for (co)curricular involvement, first-year students, undergraduate seniors, students in leadership roles, students working as essential employees, international students, graduate students).

Students should be able to easily see in the registration system whether a course is being taught asynchronously, synchronously, or in a hybrid.

Ensure that students have a computer and broadband access.
- Consider or address workload issues for faculty, especially those who have to make larger changes or changes to a larger number of courses in order to accommodate hybrid.
- Develop awareness and training for available online exam proctoring solutions and other ways to safeguard academic integrity.
- Greater integration and use of multiple educational modalities is a best practice that addresses diverse learners with different learning styles and proficiencies and may need attention.
- Creating both the in-person and online for class offerings, utilizing the learning management system to offer the class may need to be considered.
- Schools may need to provide additional technology, such as microphones and video recording devices, within classrooms and labs.
Online Only Course Offerings

Schools should plan for a future when it is still unsafe to bring students back to campus and resume in-person courses. Faculty and instructors may need to plan for this to the best of their abilities and offer their courses remotely. Schools may need to continue professional development efforts to support instructors moving courses into remote instruction environments.

The fall semester will be more organized and more thoroughly considered. Schools may need to work with instructors in an intentional design and think carefully about how to achieve high educational standards. This is the safest scenario in terms of reducing human contact.

This scenario will take place if schools must move to the “Stay Home” order, if a new one is announced during fall semester. This could happen during the first half, the second half, or for the full term.

Assumptions

- Campuses may not be able to offer all courses online and some courses may need to be canceled.
- Faculty may need to be allowed in their lab or classroom to provide a better educational experience for students and to continue their research activities.
- The impact on enrollment is difficult to predict, although most would assume that not all students will choose to return in the fall and campuses may see a drop in enrollment and tuition. For some students, however, the savings incurred through living at home may make online instruction both more attractive as well as more feasible, given the economic impacts on families.
- Some vulnerable individuals may need to observe ongoing physical distancing for a more prolonged period of time.7
- Students may not have broadband access or the computer/technology they need to be effective. Online instruction still assumes that some students may be on campus and that there ought to be a petition process for students that need access to campus in order to stay enrolled.
- Faculty and students do not have equal access and do not have equal spaces for teaching and learning. Our online environments will exacerbate inequalities that may impact outcomes.
- Students may need coaching for how to succeed in online course environments.
- Students and faculty may need increased security resources to ensure academic integrity.
- International students may not be allowed in the country right away.
- Faculty should not be expected to accomplish everything that would normally be expected in an in-person scenario, but should be expected to maximize the basics of instruction such as the AAHE’s “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education”: regular
contact between students and faculty, reciprocity and cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.

**Operationalizing**

- A full curricular review may need to take place to identify:
  - courses that can readily transition to online
  - courses that need additional support (e.g., desktop virtualization, alternatives to hands-on experiences),
  - courses that will have to be delayed.

- Programs that choose to delay courses may need to develop spring-term contingencies that allow students to make up coursework in order to stay on track.
  - If students put off courses it can derail them for a full year, depending on course sequencing. As much as possible, leverage available resources to try to ensure that students do not fall behind.
  - Possibilities include creating new classes that don’t require hands-on experiences, deferring just the hands-on elements, utilizing electronic simulations, or waiving the requirement. Some programs might consider creating accelerated hands-on experiences.

- Students and faculty might consider providing support to help discern and address inequalities in course delivery and reception.

- Online instructional materials should comply with ADA accessibility requirements.

- Quality education online requires increased time and effort, and may require lower enrollment caps or additional instructional help.

- Faculty may need to indicate and students will need to easily see in the registration system whether a course is being taught asynchronously, synchronously, or in a hybrid.

- With an early decision and communication plan, campuses/colleges could ask students about their intent for the fall. With enrollment projections, departments might be able to offer faculty expedited sabbaticals/leaves or the opportunity to teach fewer courses. This may free up funding for campuses to offer more for professional development flexibility over the summer.

- Campuses may need to review policies for requests/petitions to live on campus and occupancy thresholds to ensure that they are still able to meet safety guidelines.

- Resources might need to be developed and distributed for students who need help with online course performance.

- Academic alerts would help faculty and advisors identify struggling students and direct them to support.
▪ Students should have a clear and responsive process for acquiring internet connections and hardware sufficient for full participation in classes.

▪ Campuses should develop awareness and training for available online exam proctoring solutions and other ways to safeguard academic integrity.

▪ For international students that are unable to come to the U.S. due to visa concerns, schools should develop an international online curriculum for fall term.

▪ Campuses should build their capacity to resume not only their primary responsibilities (under conditions where some people continue to work from home and budgets are strained) but also the competency to understand their role in remaining flexible should circumstances change in light of Covid-19. Faculty and staff should be protected, trained, and adequately prepared. Workforce protection and safety are critical to reopening, and measures should be taken to ensure the faculty, staff, students, and campus community have appropriate protective controls, plans, supplies, and guidance to safely return to work.

Risks/Challenges

▪ This scenario disproportionately impacts some academic programs, colleges, and campuses. For example, acting, ceramics, and orchestra may all have potentially insurmountable challenges in a remote environment.

▪ Campuses should protect the instructors and faculty from burnout. We need to offer enough support so that they don’t feel defeated before the term starts. Moreover, most instructors and faculty are on 9-month contracts.

▪ Equity, inclusion and a sense of belonging are all difficult to replicate in online environments, and this may disproportionately impact students from culturally and identity-based diverse backgrounds and experiences.
CDC Guidance: Institutions of Higher Education Decision Tree

The chart below depicts some examples, possible considerations and guidance as the committee reviewed the Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) Decision Tree regarding “community transmission”. It provides some ideas on when a case is confirmed on our campuses and how to potentially handle them. However, we also realize that each school's situations and the handling of possible transmission and mitigation will be different across the state.


- Guidance for IHE is organized into three categories based on the level of community transmission:
  - when there is **no community transmission** (preparedness phase)
  - when there is **minimal** to moderate community transmission, and
  - when there is **substantial** community transmission.

Consult with your local health department to determine what level of transmission is currently occurring in your community.

- Guidance is also provided for when a confirmed case has entered an IHE, regardless of community transmission.

Proposed steps that IHEs can implement in response to local conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Transmission Level</th>
<th>Proposed Measures</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No community transmission (Before COVID-19 &amp; relaxed by state) [relaxed social distancing]</td>
<td>No specific measures mentioned for this scenario.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal to moderate community transmission [moderately restrictive health habits]</td>
<td>Consider implementing social distancing in classrooms • students in “shifts” (i.e. MWF class, ⅓ in-person M, ⅓ in-person W, ⅓ in-person F)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial community transmission [significantly restrictive health habits, potentially stay-at-home order]</td>
<td>• Consider suspending most in-person classes; • students in “shifts” with less frequency or length of in-class time</td>
<td>Consider suspending targeted in-person classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A confirmed case in IHE, regardless of community transmission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-person classes

Relaxed restrictions

Consider implementing targeted in-person classes
<p>| Working Strategies for Classrooms, Labs, Tech Focused, and Other Learning Settings |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Instructional Design            | Relaxed restrictions            | Consider implementing mixed-mode instruction and targeted online instruction | Consider implementing mixed-mode instruction and targeted online instruction |
| Classroom layout                | Relaxed restrictions            | Consider spacing seats farther apart | Consider making available seats 6’ apart |
| Seating Assignments and attendance | Relaxed restrictions            | Consider implementing seating assignments | Consider implementing seating assignments and taking attendance |
| Entering and exiting protocols  | Relaxed restrictions            | Consider implementing one-way movement into and out of classrooms | Consider regulating movement in corridors and 6’-separated single file entry/exit |
| Time in classroom               | Full period                     | Consider shortening in-person meeting time | Further, curtail meeting time |
|                                 |                                 |                                  | No in-person meeting time |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relaxed restrictions</th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Consider lengthening passing time</th>
<th>Consider lengthening passing time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passing time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom cleaning</strong></td>
<td>Relaxed restrictions</td>
<td>Consider regular disinfection</td>
<td>Consider more frequent disinfection between classroom turnover</td>
<td>Consider more frequent disinfection, extensive cleaning of impacted spaces; may need to move some sections to other buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hygiene</strong></td>
<td>Promote hand-washing, covering cough</td>
<td>Promote more frequent hand washing/ Sanitizing, face coverings</td>
<td>Consider requiring face coverings</td>
<td>Consider requiring face coverings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air exchanges</strong></td>
<td>Relaxed restrictions</td>
<td>Consider increasing air exchanges in targeted classrooms (e.g. choir, theater, PE)</td>
<td>Consider only using classrooms with increased air exchanges.</td>
<td>Consider increasing air exchanges in targeted classrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

In summary, the Classroom, Lab, Tech Focused, and Other Learning Settings committee are providing guidance and considerations for our schools across the state of Minnesota as we realized that we all offer a wide range of programs to very diverse populations. Our focus is on still providing the best educational opportunities to our students while adhering to the state regulations. We understand it is important to protect the instructors, faculty, staff and students by reducing exposure.
References

4. COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Higher Education
Appendix A

Examples of physical layouts of rooms to provide context for enrollments sizes:
Social Distancing of 6’ Classroom Examples Shown Below:
Examples of physical layouts of rooms to provide context for enrollments sizes:
Social Distancing of 3 foot Classroom Examples Shown Below:
For fixed seating, Cal State Fullerton has developed a simple yet effective seating chart that ensures that a particular seat is not used during consecutive classes, and ensures good distancing among students. This is an interesting possibility:

![Sue's Seating Chart Matrix]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Efficiency</th>
<th>Rows</th>
<th>Columns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>35%</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Each class utilizes a different numbered seat to sit in.

Cleaning of seats is only required after 3 classes.

Chart can be expanded to fit any number of rows and columns.

sfisher 5/13/20 CSUF
## Appendix B

### Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Role</th>
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<td>Vice Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty, Professor of Biology</td>
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